# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

# **ECOLOGICAL SITE DESCRIPTION**

# **ECOLOGICAL SITE CHARACTERISTICS**

Site Type: Rangeland

Site Name: Draw

Site ID: R042XB016NM

Major Land Resource Area: 042 - Southern Desertic Basins, Plains, and Mountains

## **Physiographic Features**

This site occurs as desert drainage ways, draws or swales, which dissect plains, piedmonts, or low hills. These drainage ways may be narrow fingers or broad swales which appear almost flat but are in fact lower than surrounding terrain. The site receives and transports runoff water from both higher elevations within its own confines and from surrounding sites. Flooding may occur as may as two or three times a year in favorable years, but deep wetting is not the usual result of any one overflow occasion. Slopes average less than 3 percent and direction of slope varies without significance. Elevations range from about 3800 to 5000 feet above sea level.

Land Form: (1) Drainageway

(2) Draw

(3) Swale

 Elevation (feet):
 Minimum
 Maximum

 Slope (percent):
 3800
 5000

 Slope (percent):
 1
 3

 Water Table Depth (inches):
 N/A
 N/A

Flooding:

Frequency: Occasional Frequent
Duration: Very brief Brief

Ponding:

Depth (inches):N/AN/AFrequency:NoneOccasionalDuration:NoneNoneRunoff Class:MediumVery high

Aspect: No Influence on this site

## **Climatic Features**

Annual average precipitation ranges from 8 to 10.5 inches. Wide fluctuations from year to year are common, ranging from a low of about 2 inches to a high of over 20 inches. At least one-half of the annual precipitation comes in the form of rainfall during July, August, and September. Precipitation in the form of snow or sleet averages less than 4 inches annually. The average annual air temperature is about 61 degrees F. Summer maximums usually exceed 100 degrees F., and winter minimums can go below zero. The average frost-free season exceeds 200 days and extends from April 1 to November 1.

	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>
Frost-free period (days):	179	212
Freeze-free period (days):	200	233
Mean annual precipitation (inches):	8.0	10.5

Monthly precipitation (inches) and temperature (°F):

• • •	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	<u>Jun</u>	<u>Jul</u>	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Precip. Min.	0.37	0.36	0.23	0.18	0.29	0.57	1.42	1.92	1.53	1.01	0.48	0.57
Precip. Max.	0.54	0.39	0.27	0.36	0.45	0.64	1.9	2.2	1.66	1.07	0.58	0.78
Temp. Min.	20.8	25.5	31.2	38.0	46.4	54.3	61.1	59.1	51.5	39.8	28.8	22.3
Temp. Max.	58.1	63.8	71.0	79.7	87.4	96.4	95.5	92.7	87.5	78.7	67.2	58.5

Climate Stations: (1) NM3855, Hatch. Period of record 1961 - 1990

(2) NM8387, Socorro. Period of record 1961 - 1990

# **Influencing Water Features**

This site is not influenced by wetland or streams.

Wetland Description:	<u>System</u>	<u>Subsystem</u>	Class
(Cowardin System)			

## **Representative Soil Features**

The soils are deep, well drained, and are commonly flooded. Typical surface layers are silty clay loams, clays, and silt loams. Underlying layers are variable but are usually fine-textured. Water intake rates are moderately slow to slow, permeability is slow to very slow, and water-holding capacity is high. The soils tend to seal on the surface when vegetative cover is reduced or removed, crack noticeably, and are greatly subject to gullying, piping, and draining. Flooding may be of short duration but may also come as many as three or four times a year.

## **Predominant Parent Materials:**

Kind: Alluvium Origin: Mixed

Surface Texture: (1) Silty clay loam (2) Clay loam Clay (3) Subsurface Texture Group: Clayey Surface Fragments <= 3" (% Volume): 0 Surface Fragments > 3" (% Volume): 0 <u>Subsurface Fragments <= 3" (% Volume):</u> 0 Subsurface Fragments > 3" (% Volume):

<u>Drainage Class:</u> Moderately well drained To Well drained

Permeability Class: Moderately slow To Very slow

	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>
Depth (inches):	24	72
Electrical Conductivity (mmhos/cm):	0	8
Sodium Absorption Ratio:	0	2
Calcium Carbonate Equivalent (percent):	N/A	N/A
Soil Reaction (1:1 Water):	7.4	8.4
Soil Reaction (0.01M CaCl2):	N/A	N/A
Available Water Capacity (inches):	4.0	7.0

## **Plant Communities**

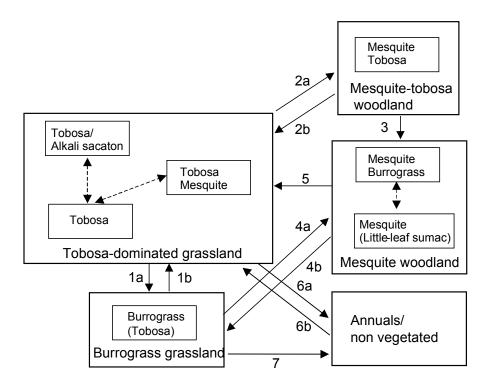
#### **Ecological Dynamics of the Site**

#### Overview

Vegetation patterns in this site are governed largely by patterns in the flow of run-in water. This site may intergrade with the Clayey site depending on microtopographic effects on drainage and run-in water and areas within Clayey sites may behave like draws. Draw sites are often upslope from Bottomland sites. In SD-2, the Draw site appears in two distinct landscape positions, 1) in long, narrow (e.g. 100 m wide) swales that receive and transport run-in water from adjacent, hills (e.g. Gravelly or Limestone Hills sites) and 2) in broad (e.g. 1000 m) swales that are only slightly lower than the surrounding upland sites (e.g. Loamy or Sandy sites). The historic plant community type of the Draw site is dominated by tobosa (*Pleuraphis mutica*) and to a lesser extent by alkali sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*) and vine mesquite (*Panicum obtusum*). Blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*) can be an important component of many draws and may have dominated many draws in the past. Initial stages of change due to grazing are characterized by loss of species diversity and dominance by tobosa. Transitions to burrograss (*Scleropogon brevifolius*) may occur in response to the redistribution of run-in water via loss of grass, and subsequent erosion and gullying. This may also facilitate mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) invasion. Subsequent overgrazing may reduce the tobosa cover, resulting in a mesquite woodland state. Degradation of burrograss grasslands due to severe disturbance may result in an annual-dominated state.

No studies exist that address the causes of transitions within this site. Overall, tobosa and burrograss grasslands characteristic of draw soils are more stable and recover faster than black grama grasslands in the face of drought, likely due to the presence of heavier soils and a run-on landscape position. Additionally, tobosa is often less palatable than grasses found in adjacent ecological sites, leading to reduced utilization of this ecological site. Overutilization of tobosa, however, may occur during spring when plants are reproducing (Phil Smith, BLM Las Cruces, personal communication

## State-Transition model: MLRA 42, SD-2, Nonsaline fine-soils group: Draw



- 1a. Overgrazing, reduction of grass cover, reduction of soil moisture input, soil crust formation
- 1b. Gully destruction and grazing rest
- 2a. Reduction of soil moisture input, increases in bare patches, reduction of fire frequency, mesquite exceed 0.5 in. diameter.
- 2b. Mesquite removal and reestablishment of hydrologic function and/or historic fire frequency
- 3. Overgrazing, gullying, soil degradation
- 4a. Mesquite invasion. 4b. Mesquite removal.
- 5a, 6. Severe disturbance and soil degradation. 5b. Restoration of soil permeability, hydrology, and seeding

# MLRA 42; SD-2; Draw

## Landscape view of Draw



- •Tobosa dominated swale between sandy ecological sites
- •Dona Ana-Reagan map unit , Jornada Exp. Range, Dona Ana Co.

Tobosa-dominated





- •Tobosa is very dominant, some alkali sacaton and mesquite
- •Grass cover high, low diversity
- •Dona Ana-Reagan map unit , Jornada Exp. Range, Dona Ana Co.

**Burrograss-dominated** 





- •Burrograss is very dominant, some mesquite cover, as above
- •Grass cover low, some large bare spots
- •Site downslope of earthen tank
- •Dona Ana-Reagan map unit , Jornada Exp. Range, Dona Ana Co.

Mesquite-tobosa woodland





- •Large mesquite coexisting with tobosa (left) or with tobosa locally extirpated, note patches further from mesquite (right)
- •Grass cover moderate to low and patchy
- •Stellar association map unit, Dona Ana Co.

## Non-vegetated



- •Dead and decadent tobosa
- •Mostly bare ground, signs of soil erosion and crusting. Has probably crossed a threshold over much of the area.
- •Site between road and water tank
- •Mimbres map unit, Dona Ana Co., NM

## **State Containing the Historic Climax Plant Community**

<u>Tobosa-dominated grassland state</u>: The historic plant community is believed to be tobosa-dominated and may include alkali sacaton or vine mesquite in microsites (depressions) where water collects for periods longer than a few days. Blue grama may have been dominant or co-dominant with tobosa in many draws (Phil Smith, BLM Las Cruces, personal communication) and blue grama tends to increase in abundance with grazing rest. Sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) and cane bluestem (*Bothriochloa barbinodis*) are also present. Production ranges from 2000 lbs/acre in favorable years to 600 lbs/acre in unfavorable years. At its most pristine, the draw site is characterized by a high diversity of grasses. Retrogression within this state results in the reduction or loss of blue grama, vine mesquite, cane bluestem, and other grasses due to grazing and/or a reduction of soil moisture availability, and a homogeneous stand of tobosa remains. These grasses may become locally extinct, but could be reintroduced through natural or management means. Mesquite and other shrubs or trees (e.g. desert willow *Chilopsis linearis*, littleleaf sumac *Rhus microphylla*, fourwing saltbush *Atriplex canescens*) may be present and persist in low densities, especially at draw margins. Tobosa is reputedly fire tolerant. Given the large fuel loads typical of draw sites, fire may have been an important feature of the site.

<u>Diagnosis</u>: Cover of grasses high, nearly continuous. Alkali sacaton and vine mesquite present. Mesquite are small or sparse if present, and bare patches are small (< 50 cm) and infrequent. Litter cover dominates most plant interspaces.

Ground Cover (Average Percen	t of Surface Area).
Grasses & Forbs	40
Bare ground	35
Surface gravel	0
Surface cobble and stone	0
Litter (percent)	25
Litter (average depth in cm.)	5

## Plant Community Annual Production (by plant type):

Annual Production (lbs/ac)

Plant Type	Low	RV	High
Grass/Grasslike	516	1118	1720
Forb	42	91	140
Tree/Shrub/Vine	42	91	140
Lichen			
Moss			
Microbiotic Crusts			
Totals	600	1300	2000

## Historic Climax Plant Community Plant Species Composition: Plant species are grouped by annual production **not** by functional groups.

not by fi	anctional groups.		A	سمنه مسلم
	Grass/Grasslike		Annual Pro in Pounds I	
Group	Common Name	Scientific Name	Low	<u>High</u>
1	tobosagrass	Pleuraphis mutica	650	780
2	vine mesquite alkali sacaton	Panicum obtusum Sporobolus airoides	195	260
3	cane bluestem sideoats grama Arizona cottontop	Bothriochloa barbinodis Bouteloua curtipendula Digitaria californica	65	130
4	threeawn feather fingergrass mat muhly burrograss plains bristlegrass	Aristida Chloris virgata Muhlenbergia richardsonis Scleropogon brevifolius Setaria vulpiseta	13	65
5	Graminoid (grass or grasslike)		13	39
	Shrub/Vine		Annual Pro in Pounds I	
<u>Group</u>	Common Name	Scientific Name	Low	<u>High</u>
6	whitethorn acacia desert willow condalia spp. catclaw mimosa littleleaf sumac	Acacia constricta Chilopsis lineacis Condalia Mimosa aculeaticarpa Rhus microphylla	39	104
7	fourwing saltbush broom snakeweed crown of thorns honey mesquite	Atriplex canescens Gutierrezia sarothrae Koeberlinia spinosa Prosopis glandulosa	13	39
	Forb		Annual Pro in Pounds I	
Group	Common Name	Scientific Name	Low	<u>High</u>
8	desert holly scorpion weed woolly plantain globemallow vervain	Acourtia nana Phacelia integrifolia Plantago patagonica Sphaeralcea Verbena	13	39
9	Forb (herbaceous, not grass nor grasslike)		39	104
Plant Gr	owth Curve:			

Plant Growth Curve: Growth Curve Number: NM2508

Growth Curve Name: HCPC
Growth Curve Description: SD-2 Draw HCPC Warm Season Plant Community

Percent Production by Month

<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	Mar	<u>Apr</u>	May	<u>Jun</u>	<u>Jul</u>	Aug	<u>Sep</u>	<u>Oct</u>	Nov	Dec
0	0	0	5	10	10	2.5	30	15	5	0	0

**Transition to burrograss state (1a):** This can occur in response to changes in water flow or soil permeability catalyzed by overgrazing. Removal of tobosa may increase the rate of water flow down the draw and result in gullying. Channelization of subsequent flood waters into the gully diverts run-in water that favors tobosa and produces conditions more suitable for burrograss (see Paulsen and Ares 1962, Gibbens and Beck 1988). The physical blockage of water flow by dams may have a similar effect. Alternatively, exposure of soil to raindrop impact may promote soil crusting and erosion and reduce infiltration. A temporal decline in rainfall amounts and water flow in some draws could lead to similar changes without much grazing pressure (Campbell 1931).

<u>Key indicators of approach to transition</u>: Decreases in grass diversity and tobosa cover, increases in burrograss cover, increases in bare ground cover, decreases in litter cover, decreases in flooding frequency and duration. The presence of blockage to surface flow would be an important indicator.

**Transition to mesquite-tobosa woodland state (2a):** Overgrazing of tobosa, erosion, and resultant channelization or the impedance of surface water flow may facilitate the encroachment of honey mesquite or other shrubs into draws. The mechanism underlying this response may be a reduction in soil moisture that favors mesquite establishment. Alternatively, increasing mesquite establishment in degraded draws may be due to diminished competition from tobosa or lowered frequency of fire-generated disturbances due to grazing. Fire may remove (or topkill) small (< 3.5 yr old, < 0.5 inch stem diameter) mesquite (Wright et al. 1976). The maintenance of a shrubfree grassland using fire cannot be achieved once herbaceous cover is less than 600 lbs/acre (Wright and Bailey 1980). Thus, once grass biomass has permanently declined below this value (e.g. when burrograss dominates), the control of mesquite with fire is not possible.

<u>Key indicators of approach to transition</u>: Decreases in grass cover, increases in bare ground cover, decreases in litter cover, decreases in flooding frequency and duration. If mesquite plant density is increasing, then the transition may have occurred. It is possible that mesquite seedlings normally increase until the next fire disturbance, but there are no data to support or refute this.

**Transition to annual-dominated state (6a):** This can occur if continued extreme overutilization, mechanical disturbance due to offroad vehicle use, and subsequent soil loss and/or physical degradation decreases water infiltration and seedling germination. Under such conditions, only an ephemeral, annual-dominated community may persist.

<u>Key indicators of approach to transition</u>: Decrease in tobosa or burrograss cover, increased decadence of grasses, increases in bare ground cover and mean bare ground patch size, evidence of soil physical crusting and shrink-swell cracking, and erosion including rills and pedestalling.

#### **Additional States:**

<u>Mesquite-tobosa woodland state</u>: The amount and duration of soil moisture is hypothesized to be below a value that permits the persistence and growth of mesquite or, in some cases, other shrubs such as little-leaf sumac. Alternatively, fire frequency may be too low to suppress woody growth once the fuel provided by tobosa is lowered below a certain level (Wright et al. 1976). Mesquite tends to increase under these conditions. Tobosa may be locally extirpated due to grazing pressure but may recolonize with shrub removal and restored hydrologic inputs, and usually exists somewhere in the site.

<u>Diagnosis</u>: Tobosa cover discontinuous and patchy. Vine mesquite and alkali sacaton are usually absent. Large (> 1 m tall) mesquite are present, bare ground is associated with shrubs and patches may be large (> 2m).

**Transition to mesquite woodland state (3)**: Overgrazing or disturbance reduces the remaining tobosa. Soil degradation, gullying, and nutrient loss then accelerates the continued reduction of tobosa.

<u>Key indicators of approach to transition</u>: Decreases in tobosa cover, increases in bare ground cover, decreases in litter cover, decreases in flooding frequency and duration, terracetes, rills, gullies, soil sealing.

**Transition to tobosa-dominated grassland state (2b)**: Mechanical removal of mesquite with restored hydrology, if necessary, and subsequent recovery of tobosa cover and fire frequencies. Seeding should not be necessary.

**Burrograss grassland**: This state is dominated by burrograss. Bare ground dominates the remaining ground cover. The availability of soil moisture is hypothesized to be lower in this state than in the tobosa-dominated state (c.f. Gile and Grossman 1997, Herbel and Gibbens 1989). This state has been found on the downslope side of earthen water tanks and does not appear to be common.

**Transition to mesquite woodland state (4a):** This can occur when mesquite is introduced after burrograss dominance, if the environmental conditions are suitable for mesquite germination. Fire cannot be used to control mesquite in burrograss grasslands.

Key indicators of approach to transition: Unknown, perhaps only presence of mesquite seed vectors.

**Transition to tobosa-dominated grassland state (1b):** Mechanical destruction of gullies or dams, and the use of water spreaders to promote a more even distribution of water could create conditions favorable to tobosa establishment and dominance (c.f. Rango et al., in press).

Transition to annual-dominated state (7): As for 6a above.

**Mesquite woodland**: Grasses are sparse, especially tobosa. Burrograss may dominate some patches, but bare ground and mesquite dominate the aspect of the site. Soil compaction may be important and permeability may be low.

<u>Diagnosis</u>: Tobosa is absent or reduced to a few plants or patches. Burrograss may dominate some patches. Large (> 1 m tall) mesquite are abundant, and bare ground patches are interconnected or is nearly continuous.

**Transition to burrograss grassland state (4b):** Removal of mesquite using mechanical means and herbicide. This may result in increases in burrograss cover if mesquite competes with the grass. Mesquite may recolonize.

**Transition to tobosa-dominated grassland state (5):** Removal of mesquite using mechanical means and herbicide with restoration of soil permeability (pitting?) and surface hydrologic inputs. Seeding is probably necessary.

<u>Annual-dominated</u>: The extreme drying and formation of physical soil crusts with extreme reductions in grass cover inhibits perennial plant establishment. Under these conditions, and in the absence of established shrubs, annual plants dominate (e.g cocklebur; *Xanthum strumarium*).

**Transition to tobosa-dominated grassland state (6b):** Restoration of soil permeability (pitting?) and surface hydrologic inputs. Seeding is probably necessary.

Information sources and theoretical background: Communities and states are derived largely from observations by Brandon Bestelmeyer and Jim Powell. Communities are usually defined by the primary and secondary dominant plant species, but sometimes emphasize dominant species of differing life-forms. Transitions are derived from expert opinion and are founded upon two hypotheses (same as in the Bottomland site). The channelization hypothesis holds that the loss of herbaceous vegetation cover increases erosion and channelization, and that channelization reduces soil moisture availability to grasses across broad areas. Changes in soil moisture availability, in turn, lead directly to changes in the composition of dominant plants (Gile and Grossman 1997). The fire hypothesis holds that vegetation change is limited only by limitations in the dispersal and growth of dominant shrub species. Once shrub propagules are present, vegetation change is inevitable without periodic disturbances such as fire (Brown and Archer 1989). Finally, the competition hypothesis holds that tobosa grassland maintenance depends upon the competitive exclusion of shrub seedlings due to limitations in light or nutrients (c.f. Van Auken and Bush 1990). There may be a threshold grass density below which the probability of shrub establishment increases rapidly, leading to a transition to the shrubland type.

# **Ecological Site Interpretations**

## **Animal Community:**

Habitat provided by this site supports a resident animal community that is characterized by pronghorn antelope, black-tailed jackrabbit, coyote, sparrow hawk, scaled quail, meadowlark, coachwhip, western diamondback rattlesnake, and western spadefoot toad. Where present, desert willow, littleleaf sumac, mesquite, and species of condalia provide nesting for black-throated sparrow, mockingbird, and mourning dove. At higher elevations, where the site occurs closer to mountain foothills, mule deer occasionally find cover on this site.

## **Hydrology Functions:**

The runoff curve numbers are determined by field investigations using hydraulic cover conditions and hydrologic soil groups.

Hydrologic Interpretations							
Soil Series	Hydrologic Group						
Mimbres	C						
Verhalen	D						
Russler	C						
Ubar	С						
Stellar	С						

## **Recreational Uses:**

This site offers limited recreational potential for hiking, horseback riding, nature observation and photography. It also provides hunting for quail, dove, antelope, and sometimes mule deer. Picnicking and camping are ill-advised due to the possibility of flooding.

A variety of wildflowers are present when conditions are right, from spring through fall, and the lush vegetative growth resulting from summer flooding makes this site contrast sharply with other less productive sites.

#### **Wood Products:**

This site has litle or no significant value for wood products, although driftwood is sometimes collected for use in making a variety of curiosities, decorations etc.

## **Other Products:**

This site is suitable for grazing during all seasons of the year. It is best adapted for cattle, especially to cows with calves big enough to take a substantial amount of milk, when grasses are greenest following summer flooding or overflow.

Other Information:	
Similarity Index	Guide to Suggested Initial Stocking Rate Acres per Animal Unit Month Ac/AUM
100 - 76	2.9 - 3.8
75 – 51	3.6 - 5.0
50 – 26	4.7 – 7.5
25 – 0	7.5 - +

**Plant Preference by Animal Kind:** 

	Code	Species Preference	Code	
Stems	S	None Selected	N/S	
Leaves	L	Preferred	P	
Flowers	F	Desirable	D	
Fruit/Seeds	F/S	Undesirable	U	
Entire Plant	EP	Not Consumed	NC	
Underground Parts	UP	Emergency	Е	
		Toxic	Т	

Animal Kind: Livestock

Animal Type:	Cattle													
		Plant	Plant Forage Preferences											
Common	Scientific	Part	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	О	N	D
Name	Name													
cane bluestem	Bothriochloa barbinodis	EP	U	U	U	U	U	U	P	P	D	U	U	U
Arizona cottontop	Digitaria californica	EP	U	U	U	U	U	U	P	P	D	U	U	U
alkali sacaton	Sporobolus airoides	EP	U	U	U	D	D	D	P	P	D	D	U	U
vine mesquite	Panicum obtusum	EP	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	P	P	P	D	D	NC
siedoats grama	Bouteloua curtipendula	EP	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
giant sacaton	Sporobolus wrightii	EP	U	U	U	D	D	D	P	P	D	U	U	U
tobosa	Pleuraphis mutica	EP	N/S	N/S	D	D	D	P	P	P	D	D	D	N/S
plains bristlegrass	Setaria vulpiseta	EP	D	D	D	D	D	P	P	P	P	D	D	D

# **Supporting Information**

**Associated Sites:** 

<u>Site Name</u> <u>Site ID</u> <u>Site Narrative</u>

 Clayey
 R042XB023NM

 Bottomland
 R042XB018NM

 Gravelly
 R042XB010NM

 Limestone Hills
 R042XB021NM

 Sandy
 R042XB012NM

 Loamy
 R042XB014NM

Similiar Sites:

Site Name Site ID Site Narrative

 $\begin{array}{c} \text{Clayey} & \underline{\text{R042XB023NM}} \\ \text{Bottomland} & \underline{\text{R042XB018NM}} \end{array}$ 

**State Correlation:** 

This site has been correlated with the following states: Texas

**Inventory Data References:** 

<u>Data Source</u> <u>Number of Records</u> <u>Sample Period</u> <u>State</u> <u>County</u>

Type Locality:

Relationship to Other Established Classifications:

## Other References:

Data collection for this site was done in conjunction with the progressive soil surveys within the Southern Desertic Basins, Plains and Mountains, Major Land Resource Areas of New Mexico. This site has been mapped and correlated with soils in the following soil surveys. Sierra County Dona Ana County Grant County Hidalgo County Luna County Otero County

Characteristic Soils Are:	
Mimbres silty clay loam (overflow)	Russler silt loam (overflow)
Verhalen silty clay loam (overflow)	Stellar clay loam (overflow)
Largo silt loam (overflow)	
Other Soils included are:	
Uban sandy clay loam (overflow)	Russler sandy clay loam (overflow)
Stellar sandy clay loam (overflow)	Tome silt loam (overflow)

**Site Description Approval:** 

**Site Description Revision:** 

AuthorDateApprovalDateDr. Brandon Bestelmeyer05/22/02George Chavez05/23/02

George Chavez 05/22/02